

The Occidental Building (Commercial Building)
41-47 West Washington Street
Indianapolis
Marion County
Indiana

HABS No. IN-211

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

THE OCCIDENTAL BUILDING
(Commercial Building)

HABS No. IN- 211

Location: 41-47 West Washington Street; Lot 6, City Square 66;
Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana

Present Owner: City of Indianapolis
Department of Metropolitan Development,
148 East Market Street; Indianapolis, Indiana

Present Occupant
and Use: Vacant

Significance: The Occidental Building is the work of one of Indianapolis' most famous and prolific architectural firms, Rubush & Hunter. Founded in 1905, the firm mastered the office and commercial building form until the firm's dissolution in 1938. The Occidental was designed in 1913 and constructed the following year. It was one of a series of skyscrapers constructed in post-Victorian downtown Indianapolis in an era of unbridled growth and construction terminated by the Great Depression. The Occidental Building is typical of the period with its Renaissance Revival detailing and terra cotta cladding. It contributed to the commercial streetscape of West Washington Street with its many commercial tenants from 1914 to 1945 and as the home of L. Strauss & Company, the city's oldest retail clothier, from 1945 until 1985.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: The Occidental Building was built in 1914, remodeled in 1946 and 1972. (Rubush & Hunter Collection, Architectural Archives, Indiana Historical Society, Library, Indianapolis)
2. Architects: The Indianapolis architectural firm of Rubush & Hunter designed the building in 1913-14. Architect Philip Weisenburgh of Indianapolis designed the 1945-46 remodeling. The designer or architect of the 1972 remodeling is unknown.

The Occidental Building is the work of one of Indianapolis's most famous and prolific architectural firms, Rubush & Hunter. The firm was extremely active in this period designing many of the skyscrapers immediately before the First World War and up to the Great Depression. The firm utilized terra cotta as a facade cladding material or as an accent material on a number of buildings, including theaters (Circle Theater, 1916, Indiana Theater, 1927, and Walker Theater, 1927) and office buildings (Hume-Mansur Building, 1911-1982, hotels (Hotel Lincoln, 1918-1972) and industrial buildings (Coca-Cola Company Building, 1931.) The firm of Rubush & Hunter with principals Preston C. Rubush (1867-1947) and Edgar O. Hunter (1873-1949) also designed many houses, apartment buildings, clubhouses, Old City Hall, and many commercial buildings. The firm often used sculpted Indiana limestone in styles ranging from Neo-Classical to Art Deco.

Local architect Philip A. Weisenburgh (1887-1972), formerly of Rubush & Hunter, was hired by L. Strauss & Company to redesign the Occidental Building and transform it into the L. Strauss & Company building. By 1925 he became chief draftsman for Rubush & Hunter and was responsible for the office and design supervision of the firm's commissions for hotels, commercial buildings and houses in Florida. Weisenburgh was described as the master of ornamentation and "extemporaneous" in design. Weisenburgh's obituary credits his contribution in the design of the Art Deco Circle Tower of 1929-30 and the Spanish Baroque Indiana Theater of 1926-27 ("Services Set Wednesday for Philip A. Weisenburgh," Indianapolis Star, November 14, 1972). Weisenburgh and the firm's

superintendent of construction, Ernest Werner, apparently took over the firm in 1939 after the retirement of the founders, retaining the name until possibly until 1941. Weisenburgh and Werner were partners from 1941 to 1946 (Patricia J. Casler, "The Architecture of Rubush and Hunter," Master's thesis, Columbia University, 1983, pp. 78, 112 & 113).

3. Original and subsequent owners: The Occidental Building was built for its owner, the Occidental Realty Company, on the site of the Occidental Hotel. The Occidental Realty Company purchased the site in 1906 from the heirs of Henry Schnull, owner and proprietor of the Occidental Hotel. (Marion County Recorder's Office, Deed Book 402.) The Occidental Realty Company owned the building until its sale to the City of Indianapolis on July 1, 1983 (Marion County Recorder's Office, Instrument #8345628).
4. Builder, contractor: The Occidental Building was constructed by Henry W. Klausmann, a local civil engineer and builder (Bass Photo #37280, dated December 3, 1914, Indiana Historical Society Library and R.L. Polk & Co., Indianapolis City Directory Indianapolis: R.L. Polk & Co., 1914).
5. Original plans and construction: The original plans for the Occidental Building are on file at the Indiana Historical Society. Bass Photo #37280, dated December 3, 1914 reveals that the building was constructed following the plans drawn up by Rubush & Hunter. The building was built as an eight-story, steel frame, commercial building with brick and tile curtain walls, concrete floors, terra cotta facing on the north and west walls, brick-faced east and south walls, and "makolite" interior partitions (Sanborn Map Co., Insurance Maps of Indianapolis, Indiana, New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1914, 1:21).
6. Alterations and additions: The Occidental Building was remodeled in 1945-46 according to the designs of Indianapolis architect Philip A. Weisenburgh, formerly with Rubush & Hunter. (Architectural Drawings, "Remodel of Occidental Building for L. Strauss & Company," Rubush & Hunter Collection, Indiana Historic Society.) Weisenburgh's designs called for the conversion of the multi-tenant commercial and office building into a single-use commercial building for L. Strauss & Company, a local retail clothier.

The plans called for the removal of interior commercial and office partitions into large, open work and retail spaces, and the addition of a mezzanine between the first and second floor and escalators. The most drastic change was at the first floor facade where the decorative terra cotta cladding was removed and all of the openings (entrances and windows) were reconfigured. The first floor was clad with a dark marble and the main entrance was recessed and partly hidden by exterior display cases. The galvanized-iron cornice with steel brackets and zinc ornaments was removed and replaced with a simpler, low-profile, metal cornice (Bass Photo #267549, dated September 13, 1946; and the drawings, Indiana Historical Society Library). Brandt Brothers & Company was the local general contractor and Wege Marble & Tile Company and the Santarossa Mosaic & Tile Company both, of Indianapolis, were listed as sources of the project (Full-page advertisement, "Our Hats Are Off to One and All Who Labored to Bring This Building to Its Present Point of Completion," Indianapolis Star, April 1, 1946, p.3).

The Occidental Building was again remodeled in 1972. An Indianapolis Star newspaper article (Philip F. Clifford, "Downtown Store of Strauss Having Fine Face-Lifting," November 9, 1972, p. 64, c.1) described the project as having been extended over several years from approximately 1970 to 1973, with the renovation of the first, second, third and fourth floors. In this project the exterior of the first floor was again refaced and the main entrance altered. The dark marble facade of 1945-46 was removed and refaced with a "buff Travertine Marble" and the area south of the Illinois Street entrance was covered with "a deep coffee-colored Franciscan tile." In the course of this remodeling, the directly applied bronze letters of the old sign were removed and replaced with a projecting cube sign at the Illinois and Washington Streets corner.

B. Historical Context

The Occidental Building was constructed in 1914 for the Occidental Realty Company as a speculative commercial and office building. The Occidental Building is located at an

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intersection in the heart of the downtown, one block from Monument Circle, the very center of the Mile Square, the original 1821 plan of the City of Indianapolis. Washington Street (the National Road, U.S. 40) has served as the major retail street, the main street, of the city since its founding. The Occidental Building occupies the site of the four-story, brick Occidental Hotel, built in 1856. The original structure was designed in 1913 and constructed the following year. The Occidental was one of a series of skyscrapers constructed in Post-Victorian downtown Indianapolis. This construction era began in 1893 with the construction of the Majestic Building at 47 South Pennsylvania Street and ended in 1930 with the completion of the Circle Tower at 5 East Market Street on Monument Circle. This era of unbridled downtown growth and construction was terminated by the Great Depression.

The Occidental Realty Company was headed by Gustave A. Efroymsen (1870-1946) who was very active in several different business ventures including partnership with Louis Wolf in Efroymsen & Wolf clothiers, president and general manager of H.P. Wasson & Company department store, president of Real Silk Hosiery Mills, and director of a bank, a trust company, and a utility company ("Gustave A. Efroymsen Head of Real Silk, Dead Here at 76," Indianapolis Times, November 4, 1946).

During the 1914-45 period of the building's history, the building had a variety of tenants occupying the entire building from the basement to the eighth floor. Similar to the old Occidental Hotel, which preceded the building on the site, the Occidental Building housed a number of retail tenants on the street level first floor with direct access to Illinois and Washington Streets. The entrance to the businesses and offices on the upper floors and in the basement was at 41 West Washington via a stair and elevator lobby.

Two, long-term tenants of this period were Hooks Drugs and L. & P. Efroymsen, a men's clothier, both from 1914 to 1945 on West Washington Street. Tenants along South Illinois in the small commercial spaces were not as stable and as long-lasting. They were typically candy shops, shoe stores, millineries, jewelers, shoe, hat, and small clothing stores. From 1914 until the early 1930's the E. O. Langen Women's Apparel and Furs occupied the entire second floor of the Occidental. (Polk, 1916-35; and Bass

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Photo #37280, Indiana Historical Society Library). The second through fourth floors were advertised as being "planned for specialty shops and stores, higher floors for offices." (Bass Photo #37280.) The city directories document the many and diverse, small retail business up to the fourth floor and the many offices above.

The watershed of the building's history occurred in 1945 when L. Strauss Company announced its lease of the entire Occidental Building. This resulted in ending both the building's function as multi-tenant, retail and office building and in the building's interior and exterior remodeling to suit the new use and the taste of the times ("Strauss to Take Over Occidental Building Soon."

Indianapolis News, June 1, 1945, p. 1, c.1: "L. Strauss & Company Leases Occidental Building; Store Will Move After September 1." Indianapolis Star, June 2, 1945, p. 3, c.2).

The 1945-46 remodeling resulted in the removal of all of the interior partitions separating the elevator halls the shops and offices of all eight floors and the basement. The space was transformed into open retail use on the first through third floors with business offices on the seventh floor, inventory storage, alterations and shipping on other floors.

Other interior changes included the addition of central air conditioning and escalators on the first, second and third floors; and the additions of Art Moderne Style railings for stairs to the upper floors and to the added mezzanine.

Changes to the exterior included the removal of the terra cotta on the Washington and Illinois Streets first-floor facades and their refacing with dark, polished marble. The original store bays, piers and transoms were eliminated and replaced by a display window band wrapping around the Illinois and Washington corner with small display windows within the old bay areas along Illinois Street. The galvanized-iron cornice was removed and replaced with a similar, low-profile cornice, but this specification is absent from the collection of drawings (Philip A. Weisenburgh, "Remodel of Occidental Building for L. Strauss & Company," Rubush & Hunter Collection, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis).

The Occidental was remodeled again in the early 1970's with most the changes being cosmetic. A 1972 newspaper article described the remodeling work as being in progress "for more than 1 1/2 years." It described the remodeling of the first floor to be completed by Christmas of 1972. The Washington and Illinois Streets facades from street level to the second floor to be "covered with a buff Travertine marble; the area south of the Illinois Street doors will be faced with a deep coffee-colored Franciscan tile."

The article also mentioned the interior work, in that the second floor had already been completed and that the third and fourth floors were to "get full redecoration treatment" early in 1973. (Philip F. Clifford, "Downtown Store of Strauss Having Fine Face-Lifting," Indianapolis Star, November 9, 1972, p. 64, c.1).

The Occidental Building contributed to the commercial landscape of West Washington Street with its many commercial tenants from 1914 to 1945 and housing one of the City's oldest clothiers until 1985.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: The Occidental Building is an eight-story, Renaissance Revival building constructed in 1914. Occupying an important commercial intersection, the two exposed principal facades (west and north) are clad with glazed terra cotta, the remaining facades are faced with brick. In 1945-46 the first-floor facades of the north and west were extensively remodeled with the removal of the terra cotta and the reconfiguration of all of the openings. This remodeling was in turn undone with another remodeling in the 1970s. With the 1945-46 remodeling the building was converted to a single-tenant commercial building, changing from a multi-tenant commercial and office use. The original metal cornice was removed and replaced with a simplified one during the 1945-46 renovation. Despite the alteration of the cornice and first-floor, facades of the seven floors between them have remained unaltered with terra cotta cladding, tri-and quadri-partite fenestration and the ornamental belt course and cornice at the fourth-floor level.
2. Condition of fabric: The Occidental is generally in good condition with no maintenance since its vacation in 1985.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The Occidental Building is located on the rectangular shaped Lot 6 of City Square 66. The building is 195 feet long and 67 1/2 feet wide and occupies the entire lot. The basement extends under the sidewalks of Illinois and Washington Street.

The Illinois Street facade is divided into nine equal-sized bays and the Washington Street facade into three. The building is eight stories high and has a full basement.

2. Walls:

- a. North and West elevations: Each structural bay of the second through fourth stories is divided into three windows, each with a transom. The windows are divided vertically by terra cotta mullions and the transoms by a wooden transom bar. The center window is fixed and is wider than the two flanking double-hung sash windows. The bays of fifth through eighth stories are divided into four equal-sized windows. The building's body is effectively divided into two portions by a cornice and a band of repeating low-relief panels found on the piers and in a continuous band at the spandrel level below the cornice. The decorative motifs are classical with floral swags, and cartouches, and eagles.

The spandrels of this lower portion are moulded to continue the lines of the mullions, implying a blind transom. The spandrels of the upper portion are moulded to continue the three mullions of the windows. The shallow, sheet-metal, moulded cornice rests above the tops of the piers and the tops frieze spandrels.

- b. South elevation: The south elevation faces the alley Pearl Street and is clad by buff-colored "pressed brick." It is articulated by regularly spaced single double-hung windows, two per structural bay. The eastern-most bays are doors opening onto the metal, exterior fire escape. Above the roofline of the eastern-most bay is the wall of the brick elevator penthouse. The metal-clad doors leading to the fire escape have transoms. These transoms and all the windows have four lights divided vertically. The sills and lintels of all the openings are terra cotta. The first-floor entrance from the alley, is a replacement (1945-46), glazed, metal, double-leaf door.

The terra cotta facade wraps around the corner approximately three feet and terminates as does the cornice. At the cornice level, below the tile-coped parapet is a painted-on-brick sign "L. Strauss & Co."

- c. East elevation: The east elevation is clad with red common brick, coped with tile, and punctuated with columns of windows, all with terra cotta sills and lintels. Except for the two, southern-most structural bays, the elevation is regularly punctuated by two windows per bay. The other exception to this pattern is the third northern-most bay which has only one window per floor. These bays are directly below the two penthouses. Three columns of windows were bricked up during the 1945-46 remodeling. The east elevation is exposed from the fourth story to the parapet; a three-story, commercial building abuts, and covers the first three stories of the east facade.
3. Foundations: Reinforced concrete footings support the steel structure.
4. Structural system, framing: The building has a steel frame protected with cement plaster on lath and hollow clay brick. The floor slabs are hollow clay tile with concrete topping. The terra cotta of the west and north facades is anchored to the steel frame and has masonry backing. The east and south walls are brick curtain walls. Internally, a line of columns more or less centered on the width of the building provides support for floor and roof, making the structure nine bays long and two bays wide. The curtain walls are twelve-inch thick brick walls.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The renovated first-floor entrances on the north and west facades have turn-style glass and aluminum revolving doors from the 1970s remodeling. The south facade has an aluminum and glass, double-leaf rear door. The fire escape doors are flush steel doors at each level above the first-floor, including the penthouse.
 - b. Windows: Except for the windows of the first-floor, all of the windows are original from the 1914 construction. The windows of the west and north

facades have wooden sashes. The fenestration of the second through fourth floors of these elevations is that of the Chicago style with a fixed center window sash flanked by two double-hung windows, and all three surmounted by a fixed transom. The windows are separated vertically by two terra cotta mullions. The fenestration of the fifth through eighth stories consists of four double-hung wood sashes of equal size separated by wooden mullions. The windows of the south and east are double-hung metal clad with each sash divided vertically into four panes with wire mesh opaque glass.

Roofs:

- a. Shape, covering: The Occidental Building's roof is flat with a built-up composition cladding.
- b. Cornice: The present sheet metal cornice is a replacement from the 1945-46 remodeling.
- c. Penthouses: Rising above the roofline are two penthouses, both brick faced on the east and tile-block faced on the remaining elevations. The southern penthouse rises eleven feet above the roofline, the northern one rises twelve feet above the roofline. An air conditioning cooling tower is located near the southern penthouse, forty-three feet from the southern parapet and approximately twenty-five feet from the eastern parapet.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:

- a. The remodeling of the Occidental Building in 1945-46 resulted in the removal of the 1914 interior partitions except for some of those enclosing the restrooms in the southeast corner of each story.

The first second, and third floors and the mezzanine functioned as open display and retail areas with no interior partitions except for those defining the restrooms. The fourth, and sixth floors are unbroken open spaces whereas the fifth, seventh, eighth and basement floors have interior partitions dating from the 1945-46 and the 1970s remodelings.

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2. Stairways: There is one stair reaching from the basement to the roof. It is located on the east side of the building in the fourth bay from the north. The 1943-46 remodeling resulted in the marble and cast-iron stairs being covered with terrazzo from the basement to the third floors. The fourth through eighth floor stairs have marble risers and treads with iron stringers. The 1943-46 Art Moderne railings of the first, second, and third floors and mezzanine were removed or covered over in the 1970s.
 3. Floorings: The floor covering of all floors is tile and sheet linoleum. Portions have been covered with wall-to-wall carpeting.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The ceilings of the first through fourth floors are covered by suspended acoustical tile ceilings, all other ceilings are plaster. All of the walls are plastered.
 5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Except for doors on some of the service closets in the southeast corner of the building on each floor, none of the original doors has survived. These two-over-two paneled doors have brass knobs and escutcheons.
 - b. Windows: All original doors and windows have their original wood trim.
- D. Site: The Occidental Building occupies the entire corner lot of City Square 66, facing two streets and an alley. The east wall of the building abuts a three-story commercial building. The half block immediately east of the Occidental is filled with a series of post World War Two, two-story commercial buildings, except for the afore-mentioned. At the time of the Occidental Building's construction the western half the first block of the south side of west Washington was made up of masonry commercial buildings varying in heights of three to five stories.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: The original 1913-14 drawings and the 1945-46 remodeling drawings of the Occidental Building are part of the Rubush & Hunter Collection of the Indiana Historical Society Library's Architectural Archives, 315 West Ohio Street, Indianapolis, Indiana. The collection also includes two sets of 1913 "Specifications of Building for Occidental Realty Company." Both the original specifications and the drawings have references to the Occidental Building's height at four stories and sixteen stories. Sheet 34, dated 5-19-1914, illustrates a proposed a more ornate "galvanized iron" cornice than the one constructed in 1914. The 1913-14 drawings include floor plans, building elevations, window, door, ornament details, sections, and steel framing schedules. The 1945-46 remodeling drawings by Philip A. Weisenburgh include the floor plans (including the added mezzanine); mezzanine stair detail; elevations and plans; plans and elevations of first-floor; escalator plans; and other details. Conspicuously absent are drawings detailing the replacement cornice. The collection does not contain drawings or specifications of the 1970s renovation.
- B. Historic view: The Bass Photo Collection of the Indiana Historical Society Library contains eight clear portraits of the Occidental Building between 1914 and 1946. Negatives #262610 and #262624, dated July 21, 1944, depict the building unaltered except for the loss of the prism glass transoms in some of the first-floor bays. Negative #267549, dated September 13, 1946, illustrates the newly remodeled Occidental Building with its replacement cornice and remodeled first-floor facade clad with marble. A Bretzman Photo, dated August 4, 1941 also at the Indiana Historical Society Library, documents the many tenants of the Occidental Building before the 1945-46 renovation.
- C. Bibliography
1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Casler, Patricia J. "The Architecture of Rubush and Hunter." M.S. thesis, Columbia University, 1983.

Deed Books, Marion County Recorder's Office, Indianapolis, Indiana 1906-1983.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Clifford, Philip F. "Downtown Store of Strauss Having Fine Face-Lifting." Indianapolis Star, November 9, 1972. p.64, c.1.

"Gustave A. Froyenson Head of Real Silk. Dies Here at 76." Indianapolis Times, November 4, 1946.

"L. Strauss & Company Leases Occidental Building: Store Will Move after September 1." Indianapolis Star, June 2, 1945, p. 3, c.2.

"Our Hats Are off to One and All Who Labored to Bring This Building to its Present Point of Completion." Indianapolis Star, April 1, 1946, p.3.

Polk, R. L. & Company. Indianapolis City Directory. Indianapolis: R. L. Polk & Company, 1913-1946.

Sanborn-Perris Map Company. Insurance Maps of Indianapolis, Indiana. 3 Vols., New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Company, 1898.

Sanborn Map Company. Insurance Maps of Indianapolis, Indiana. 9 Vols., New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1914-1915 and updated to 1954.

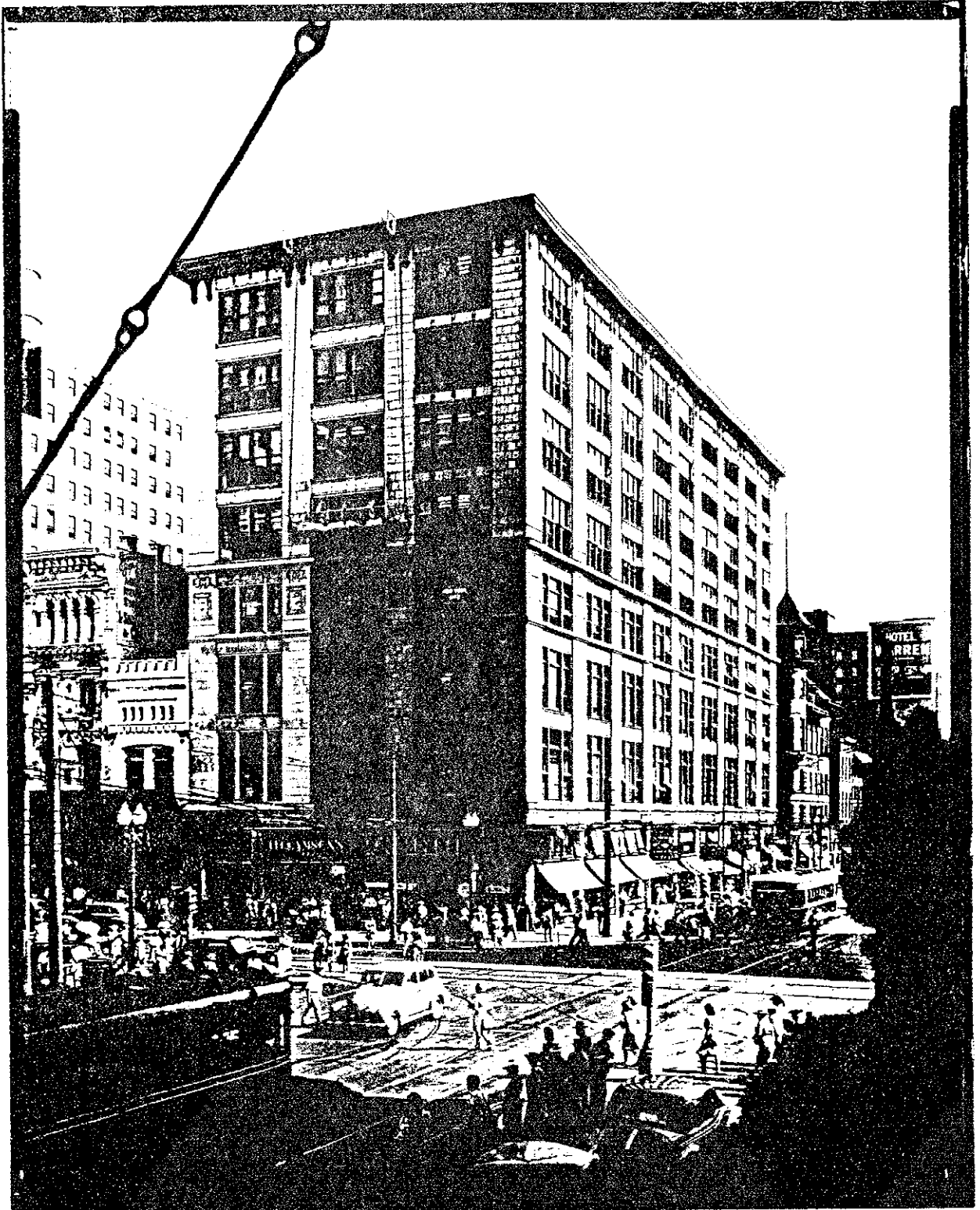
"Services Set Wednesday for Philip A. Weisenburgh." Indianapolis Star, November 14, 1972.

"Strauss to Take over Occidental Building Soon." Indianapolis News, June 1, 1945, p. 1, c. 1.

"Today's Digest: Briefly Noted." Indianapolis News, February 25, 1985, p. 25, c. 1.

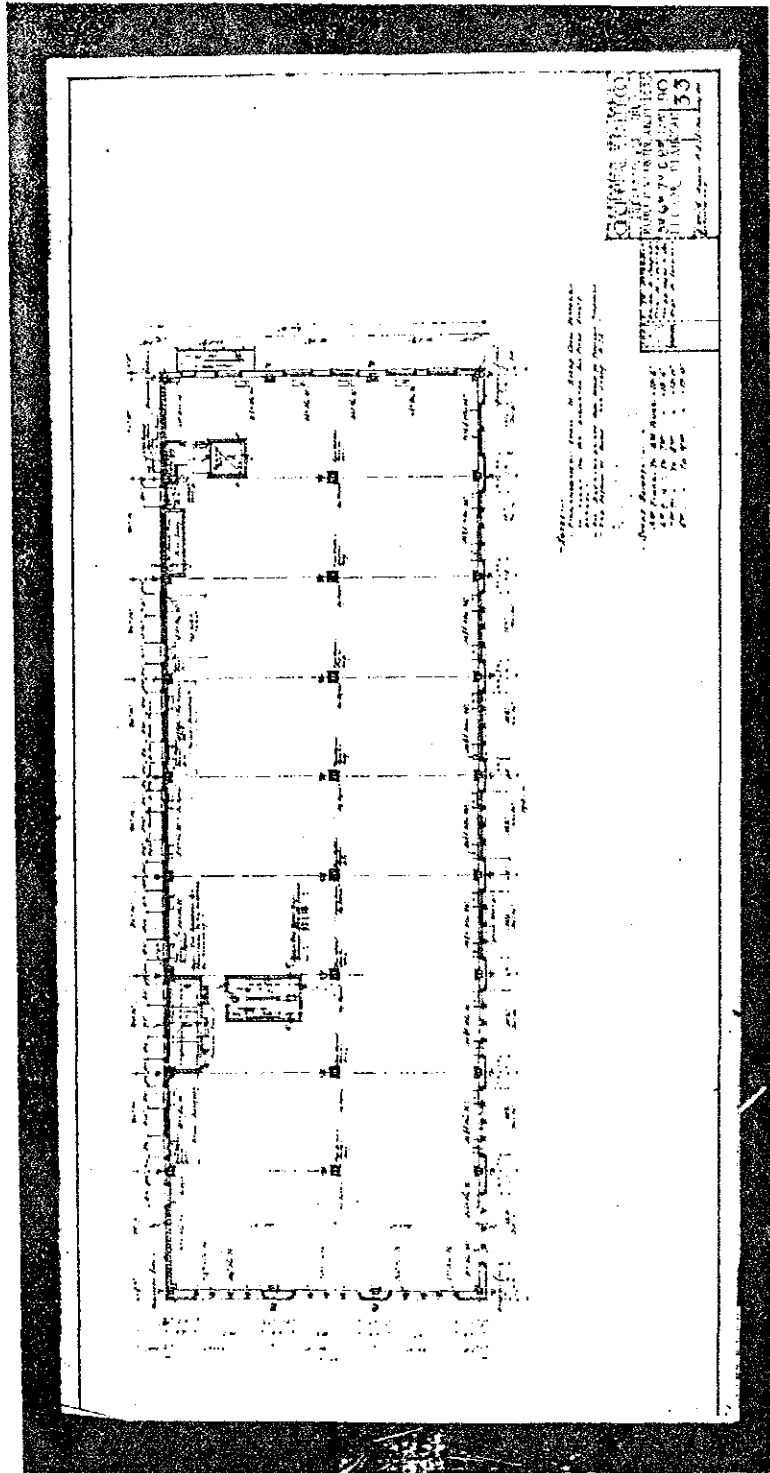
D. Supplemental Information

1. Occidental Building, August 4, 1941, Bretzman Collection; Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis.



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2. Rubush & Hunter Architects, "5th, 6th, 7th, & 8th Floor Plans.
Building for the Occidental Realty Company." Indiana Historical
Society Library, Indianapolis, Negative No. C4267.



PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission (IHPC) in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort before demolition.

Prepared by William L. Selm, Historian
Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission
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